

# Canada opposition leader backs free trade with EU

Canada's opposition leader Thomas Mulcair on Thursday came out strongly in favor of free trade with the European Union, as negotiators closed in on a deal that would be the country's largest.

Mulcair, who is leader of the left-leaning New Democratic Party, said in a speech to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations that he is "enthusiastic about the idea of deepening and increasing" trade ties with the European Union.

"A trade pact with Europe is exactly what we want," he said, as Canadian Trade Minister Ed Fast met with his EU counterpart, Karel De Gucht, in Ottawa to try to hammer out remaining sticking points.

However, Mulcair voiced concerns about European demands for longer pharmaceutical patents that would delay marketing of cheaper generic drugs, and the opening up of Canadian municipal procurements to EU companies.

Last year, Canada-EU trade topped CAN\$92.1 billion, up 10 percent from 2010 figures.

A free trade pact would give Canadian companies access to the EU market of 500 million consumers in 27 countries.

It would also eliminate 98 percent of Canadian tariffs on EU goods, effectively lowering the price of European goods sold in Canada by as much as three to five percent.